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The Great National Deliberance.

THE GREAT NATIONAL DELIVERANCE.

PS. LXVI: 10—12.

A SERMON

Preached on the Day of Thanksgiving,

DECEMBER 7, 1865,

IN

ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, WILMINGTON, DEL.

BY ALFRED LEE,
BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF DELAWARE.

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PSALM LXVI: 10—12. .

“For thou, O God, hast proved us : thou hast tried us as silver is tried: Thou broughtest us into the net : thou laidst affliction upon our loins. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads ; we went through fire and through water : but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place ”

On the 11th day of April, 1865, Abraham Lincoln, from the steps of the Executive Mansion, addressed an excited crowd, who had assembled to congratulate him upon the signal and decisive successes that had crowned the national arms. After referring to these victories as giving hope of a righteous and speedy peace, he said, “In the midst of these joyous expressions, He from whom all blessings flow must not be forgotten. A call for a National Thanksgiving is being prepared, and will be duly promulgated.”

Little knew this great and good man that the call which he was preparing for a National Thanksgiving would not be issued. Little did he, or those whom he addressed, foresee how it would be arrested, and that, before the week ended, mourning and lamentation would succeed to the shouts of gladness: instead of joyous celebrations, the great deliverance would be almost forgotten in the awful bereavement. In place of triumphant processions, with waving banners and jubilant music, an immense funeral train

would be traversing the land. And the temples of the Lord, instead of echoing hymns of grateful praise, would be thronged with sympathizing and tearful groups, pouring out their tribute of sorrowful reverence for departed excellence, and crying out of the depth unto God for help and consolation.

The dealings of the Almighty with this nation have been very marked and marvellous, and in nothing more than this, that, in the very hour of a triumph so long waited for, so ardently desired, and in itself so complete, the predominant emotion should be grief and not gladness; and a stricken, suppliant people should be bowed down in humility before the throne of grace instead of making the air ring with acclamations.

That day of Thanksgiving which the martyred President was about to announce, on the eve of his violent death, has now come. The interval, since the last armed foeman laid down his weapons, has enabled us better to estimate the magnitude of the mercies vouchsafed to us. If the public feeling shall be less tumultuous than it would have been, had such a festival come immediately after the termination of the war, it will be a profound, sober, earnest gratitude, even more genuine and heartfelt. We can now judge more calmly of the events through which we have passed—we can better gauge the awfulness of our dangers and the greatness of our deliverance;

—look down into the unfathomable abyss into which treason would have plunged the nation, and see more plainly that mighty arm which was outstretched to hold it back.

It was a considerable time before we could fairly take in the amazing mercy we had experienced. “When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion, then were we like unto them that dream.” How often, while the tempest was raging, had we strained our aching eyes to catch through the clouds and storm-rack some glimpse of the longed-for shore—the region of peace. Can it be that we are now standing there, tranquil and secure? Is the dread struggle ended? Is the hurricane spent? Is violence no more heard in the land? Has the thunder of the cannonade sunk into silence? And has peace come in the most desirable shape, sealing and settling, as we trust, forever the great principles of right, order, liberty and humanity which were at stake? Truly, the transition has been so sudden, so vast, so blessed, that we have been at times almost disposed to doubt the evidence of our senses, and to fear lest we be awakened from a pleasing illusion by the old sounds of the drum-beat and the trumpet. Even though we had such strong, unwavering confidence in the justice of our cause and its ultimate success—and I thank God my own faith never failed—yet high-raised hopes had been so repeatedly dashed, and the wisdom of man

had been so often at fault, and the period of our needful trial was so inscrutable, that, when the mercy came, it came as a surprise, and there was hardly room in our hearts to receive it.

We have often met on thanksgiving occasions. Year after year has brought us multiplied blessings to be joyfully commemorated. But never have we had a day like this. Never were a people more impressively called to celebrate the praises of the Lord. Richer mercies never wakened the song of national praise, since Moses chaunted his sublime anthem on the shores of the Red Sea, and Miriam and the daughters of Israel responded with the sound of the timbrel.

In the limited space of this service I should despair of doing justice to so grand a theme. After ages will dwell upon the trials and triumphs of the season through which we have passed with a delighted enthusiasm far more intense and glowing than that wherewith we recur to the era of the old revolution. I can only glance at some of the amazing mercies that have come to us from the Father of lights.

1. First, I name our NATIONAL PRESERVATION. The plot against the nation's life, so insidious and so formidable, has been utterly foiled. THE UNITED STATES have survived this terrible ordeal, and as one great unbroken nation challenge the respect and admiration of the powers of the world. The nation has come

out of this tremendous grapple in its integrity ; not a single star torn from its glorious banner, not a single acre severed from its magnificent domain, not a spot upon its broad area where its sovereignty is denied. The old time-honored flag, which so short a time ago was trampled in the dust, now waves triumphantly on the borders of Northern lakes, on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, along the whole course of the Mississippi, on the peaks of the Rocky mountains, where the surge of the Atlantic thunders, and where the vast Pacific shuts in the Western horizon. All this fair expanse is the heritage of one people—so to continue, we trust, to the latest generation. This vital question, so far as human wisdom can judge, is settled once for all. The most desperate and reckless ambition is hardly likely ever to renew again an attempt so completely baffled.

Now, it is not merely in a sentiment of national pride that we exult in this issue. The question was one of unutterable magnitude and importance. Upon the national life were suspended the most vital issues. Every great interest was involved in this struggle—the arts of civilization, the honors and rewards of industry, the development of our internal resources, the ability to resist foreign aggression, the perpetuity of our free institutions, the spread of education, liberty of conscience, and the purity and truthfulness of religion ; our homes, our schools, our

altars, all the goodly inheritance bequeathed to us by our fathers were at stake. For, what would have been our condition with our country broken up into fragments, or divided by an artificial boundary line, bristling on either side with bayonets; bloody forays incessantly made across the borders; neither side daring to disarm;—a chronic, ferocious warfare; a series of perpetual irritations; flames no sooner suppressed in one point than they burst out in another. And one successful conspiracy would infallibly give rise to others; a brood of serpents would be hatched from the cockatrice's eggs;—every bold, bad man would be weaving his intrigues, and hoping to carve his way by the sword to wealth and power. We may see on many pages of history the baneful consequences of a number of petty rival States inhabiting a territory adapted to a single nation. We have seen these consequences on our own continent. But a people so energetic, stirring and aggressive as the inhabitants of these States, thus separated, with so baleful a source of irritation as would exist if one side held a free and the other a slave population, would furnish a spectacle fearful indeed.

From these appalling dangers we have been preserved. The heritage of our children, as we hope and believe, is not to be anarchy, dissension, bloody strife, and eventual barbarism—but brotherly concord, equal and stable laws, order, industry, intelligence, civili-

zation, liberty and Christianity. A future opens the most magnificent that ever nation could venture to hope. The foul vulture brood, on both sides of the Atlantic, who were watching for the fall and the death-throes of this Republic, that they might feast upon the giant carcase, flee away in confusion and terror. One glorious, unbroken Commonwealth sits majestic and secure upon her Western throne.

And to whom is this preservation owing? "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give the praise." It was a dark and portentous hour when the nation was writhing and struggling in the meshes of the conspiracy that had been so artfully woven around it by secret traitors, by pampered and perjured sons. Deep laid and unscrupulous the plot had been matured, while the great mass of a generous people were unsuspecting and incredulous. When it burst out, the State found itself stripped and defenceless,—the navy dispersed, the army scattered and disabled, the treasury empty, arms and munitions of war given into the hands of enemies—treason seated in high places, lurking in official bureaus, and lifting its brazen front in the Capitol. Samson was bound, hand and foot, and the Philistines were upon him. But his locks were unshorn—patriotic devotion, self-sacrificing courage and trust in God. And He, to whom the heart of the nation turned in its surprise and agony, did not forsake us. "If the

Lord himself had not been on our side, may Israel now say, if the Lord himself had not been on our side when men rose up against us, they had swallowed us up quick. The deep waters of the proud had gone even over our soul."

2. As we are bound to ascribe to God the glory of our preservation, for vain was the help of man, so it becomes us to acknowledge his hand in *all the means that contributed to this result*. He works by instruments. He sets in motion and regulates the agencies from which great results are evolved. And it is a most interesting and delightful duty to review the course of his Providence in the recent struggle, and to trace his guiding hand. To God, then, I ascribe, with perfect confidence, the great uprising of the people to sustain their imperilled government. That sentiment of uncompromising, ardent patriotism which flashed over the land with the swiftness of the magnetic shock, which blazed forth in the city, which was felt at the fireside, which kindled its beacon fires on every cape, and headland, and hill-top, which shook the remotest hamlet, which drew forth brave men by tens and hundreds of thousands to offer up life and limb for their country—that high and noble enthusiasm was from above. It glowed in the breast of many a poor hard-working man, a pure and sacred flame. It was felt by none more deeply than by Christian people, and was largely baptized and con-

secrated by faith in God. The deep religious sentiment, so widely diffused throughout our land, felt and decided instinctively that a conspiracy, which would kindle the fires of rebellion and civil war, and jeopard in the devouring flames the dearest rights of a great people, and would cause blood to flow in rivers, for the purpose of extending and perpetuating human bondage, was a sin against God as well as a crime against humanity. The national conscience, enlightened by the Bible, decided that it was the duty of the government to withstand and suppress an attempt so odious and ruinous, and that every man with the heart of an American freeman in his breast was bound to sustain his rulers, at whatever cost. Hence the willing exposure to danger, and ungrudging sacrifice of life—the outpouring of material wealth in a constant and ever deepening stream. Hence the courage that never quailed; the fortitude and patience that never faltered; the spirit that rose up more elastic from defeat; the confidence that was unshaken in the darkest hour. Hence the clear judgment upon the great points at issue, which no artful sophistry could blind, which no appeals to fear, or selfish interest, or old prejudices, could pervert. To God I give all the praise of the liberal sympathy for the brave defenders of the land, which drew forth such exhaustless beneficence, and sustained such unprecedented and immense charities as the Christian

and the Sanitary Commission. Women were as ready to cheer on the husband and the son—to work, to nurse, to assist and comfort the combatants, as men were to follow the star-gemmed banner to the battlefield and the siege. To the Giver of every good and perfect gift I ascribe the unity of purpose, the resolution and energy that animated the different branches of the government. He raised up for us men wise in council and mighty in the field. And especially is God's hand to be recognized in the selection of the Head of the nation. How much was dependant upon the individual who should occupy at such a juncture the chair of State! And how remarkable the man elevated at so critical an hour to this awfully responsible position. Abraham Lincoln is one of the few names that will live forever, embalmed in the grateful memories of the nation in whose salvation he was so conspicuous and honored an instrument. He was unlike other public men. With the simplicity of a child, with the tenderness of a woman, without advantages of education, unfamiliar with cabinets, courts and camps, comparatively unknown and untried, he was placed in a position than which never man occupied one more trying. But he was incorruptibly honest, true to the very core of his heart, clear-sighted and discriminating, firm in his determinations, imbued with good sense and practical wisdom, confiding in the patriotism of the people,

strong in his convictions of the justice of his cause, and trustful in God. And in spite of the most envenomed hostility and artful calumnies, he made his way to the hearts of his countrymen until he filled a place there which only one man before him ever won. This man the Lord placed at the helm of the ship of State in the height of the tempest. And just when the clouds were breaking, and the welcome harbor was full in sight, he was taken away. Fearful was the shock occasioned by his bloody death, but his work was done, and by what other man could it have been better done?

3. / We are called to thank God to-day for the accomplishment of *a great moral and social revolution*—the glory of our age and country, and the marvel of the civilized world. A gigantic evil had been oppressing the nation from its infancy, shocking the moral sense of Christendom, inspiring our wisest statesmen with painful anxiety, engendering bitterness and rancor between the different sections of the land. / And yet it was so entrenched in mutual covenants, so intertwined with the policy and the industrial interests of the country, so protected by prejudice and hedged in by law, that relief seemed hopeless. As a prodigious wen it was encumbering the body, as a malignant cancer it was eating into the vitals of the State—and yet it seemed impossible to cut it out with safety to national life. Its progress threatened

death, and no less the attempt to cure. Good and wise men contemplated this dread evil almost with despair. They were dumb with conscious impotence, and the duty of submission to constitutional compacts. There was a deep-felt disquietude—a painful struggle in many a breast between the desire for harmony and the sense of right. It was felt that God would not forever tolerate such iniquity in a land calling itself Christian, that the day of reckoning must come, and be all the heavier for delay. And yet man seemed powerless and at fault. Meanwhile the evil itself was growing audacious and arrogant, assuming a fiercer and more imperious tone, seeking to bend the whole machinery of government to its behests, claiming an unlimited license to extend its blighting curse over the whole public domain, and brooking not the least check or resistance. Scripture was industriously perverted by its advocates, and the Bible was paraded as the apology for grinding oppression. At length, impatient of control, the tiger burst its chain and flew at the nation's throat. And now we have witnessed one of the most signal vindications of the great principles of divine equity ever displayed. How can a reflecting man doubt, in the face of the events that have lately transpired, that God governs the world! It is his manner to let men work out, by their own counsels and devices, the overthrow of their own cherished schemes. "The

Lord is known by the judgment that he executeth. The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands." Never was there given to the earth a more striking comment on this text and others like it. What all the opponents of slavery could not have effected in a generation, has been done by its fanatical champions. The hammer, which was wielded to strengthen and rivet the chain, has broken it in fragments. The sword, which was drawn and sharpened for its propagation, has cleft it asunder. The blood, which reckless conspirators caused to flow in fratricidal strife, has deepened into a Red Sea, in whose depths the infatuated slave-power has been whelmed and destroyed like its ancient prototype. God took the matter into his own hands. The shock, which armed rebellion gave to the land, he intensified to a great earthquake, till the very walls of the prison-house were shaken, and the prisoners' chains are loosed, and the keepers of the prison fall down trembling, and ask, "What must we do to be saved?" It is with no desire to exult over a fallen foe that I touch upon this point, but because I know not how it can be omitted in counting over the mercies to be this day acknowledged. We are bound to see the uplifted hand of God. Wilful blindness to so marvellous an interposition of the Almighty would be unpardonable denial to him of the glory that is his due. Our country, as long as God preserves it, will hail with joy and gratitude this

auspicious era. And no part of our land will have such cause for thankfulness as that which had for many years fostered the evil and experienced the pernicious effects of the wrong.

4. We thank God to-day for PEACE. And now we can better appreciate the meaning of this magic word. Before our trial came, we knew that peace was a great blessing, and we annually reckoned it among our Providential mercies : but oh, our conceptions were very faint and inadequate compared with what we now feel. We knew not then what it was to have war at our doors. Our midnight slumbers and Sabbath assemblies were not disturbed by the loud alarum. We witnessed not the long trains of armed men speeding over our railways onward to the fields where so many of them were to fill a soldier's grave. We gazed not upon returning trains filled with the sick, the wounded and the maimed. Immense hospitals were not needed to shelter the thousands of the languishing and suffering. Long lists of the killed and wounded did not stare us in the face in the daily journal, along which tear-dimmed eyes were ranging with agonizing suspense. The mother, the wife, the sister did not start and tremble at the intelligence that a great battle was imminent—or faint when their worst forebodings were confirmed. The horrors of imprisonment were not added to the dangers of the field—nor did the cheek grow pale

nor the blood curdle at the recital of woes and sufferings endured by the unhappy captive. But all these things have since become a daily experience. We have known the awful realities of warfare. We have been called to send forth our loved ones to face danger at the cannon's mouth and to stand in the imminent deadly breach. We have been surrounded by widows and orphans. We have walked among the long rows of patient sufferers. We have followed, to the sound of muffled drums, the remains of fallen heroes to their long home. Oh, we can now estimate the value of peace. And the peace that now wakens the glad pulsations of our hearts is such a peace as we may well be thankful for—not a disgraceful compromise with treason—not a precarious, hollow truce,—but a righteous and honorable peace, having the elements of perpetuity and stability, because grounded in justice, mercy and truth. Yes, ye patriot band who have fallen in this noble cause, your blood hath not been poured out in vain. The great object of your brave warfare is accomplished. Your country is, by your voluntary sacrifice, redeemed and disenthralled. Your names shall not be forgotten, nor those whom you have left behind want the nation's gratitude. Fair let the flowers bloom above your graves, and verdant be the laurel wreath that decks your monuments.

Time will not permit me to dwell upon other points

of great interest that present themselves. In so many ways has God watched over us for good that it is impossible to enumerate them without detaining you too long. How evidently Providential the remarkable health that prevailed, even in sections of our country that are usually unfavorable to the stranger! How abundant have been our harvests! How happily have we been preserved from foreign hostilities! How speedily quelled dark, domestic conspiracies! Had pestilence, famine or European warfare been added to our heavy burdens, how could we have borne up under them! And how rapidly have the stormy billows subsided and sunk to rest! Opposition to the authority of the government has utterly ceased, our own immense armies have returned to the pursuits of peaceful industry, the sword has been beaten into the plow share, the sights and sounds of war which had become so familiar vanish like the passing cloud, and the community are returning with unlooked for readiness to the accustomed occupations of peace. Far from being an exhausted, impoverished country, we have every evidence of increasing wealth and improving prospects. Surely all these things, so different from what might have been, should call forth the liveliest gratitude to our divine Guardian and Benefactor. Never did a people come out of such a struggle with resources so unimpaired and conditions so flattering.

It now becomes us, without in any degree compromising the great principles so dearly vindicated, to promote harmony and kindliness, to bury animosity, and to pour the oil and wine of Christian compassion into the wounds which the sword hath left. Those who so lately stood front to front in deadly strife are now re-united under one government. They are to dwell together henceforth as citizens of one great commonwealth. How important that genuine fraternal concord bind them heart to heart! Let us shew how distinct are firmness and constancy in maintaining a just cause from bitterness, rancor and revenge.

During the war great claims were made upon the charitable sympathies of our people, and they were nobly responded to. God, who loveth a cheerful giver, hath been educating us to give, albeit in a painful school. Other claims are now pressed upon us. From the ashes of desolated homes the cry for help is earnest and thrilling. Let us not forget the lesson we have been taught. And the great multitude to whom the national triumph hath given liberty—their old associations suddenly broken up—must inevitably suffer until time and opportunity are given for the adjustment of the new system of labor. No great social changes can take place without temporary derangement and distress. To this people the nation owes a debt of sympathy and assistance which it would be unsafe to ignore, for “their Redeemer is

mighty." Witness the fearful reckoning through which we have passed. But I trust we have no desire to ignore it, but, grateful to God for our own marvellous preservation, gladly own this obligation. And while we do not forget their bodily necessities, how important to send them means of acquiring that knowledge which will fit them for the new position they now occupy, and that better knowledge which maketh wise unto salvation !

God grant that our whole people may fitly respond to the vast mercies of which we have been the recipients. May we never forget the shield of our help, the Rock of our salvation. May it be our glory—not that we are a great, a prosperous, a formidable nation—but that we are a Christian people. Then our sun of peace and empire shall never go down in blood, but shine with ever brightening radiance until the Lord Jesus Christ returns himself to reign over a redeemed world.

"O may this goodness lead our land,
Still saved by thine Almighty hand,
The tribute of its love to bring
To thee, our Saviour and our King :

Till every public temple raise
A song of triumph to thy praise ;
And every peaceful, private home,
To thee a temple shall become."

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